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President: Mr. Essy . . . . . (Côte d'Ivoire)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 89

Environment and sustainable development

(d) Elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General (A/49/477)

Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the reports of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (A/49/84, Add.1, Add.2)

The President *(interpretation from French):* Members will recall that at its 30th plenary meeting, held on 13 October 1994, the Assembly decided to hold the debate on this sub-item of agenda item 89 directly in plenary meeting, on the understanding that action on the sub-item would be taken in the Second Committee.

In connection with this sub-item, the Assembly has before it the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa: implementation of resolution 48/191 and possible requirements for future work (A/49/477), and a series of notes by the Secretary-General transmitting the reports of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, on its third, fourth and fifth sessions (A/49/84 and Add.1 and 2).

The prosperity of future generations in a world where ecological balances will finally be protected was a central concern at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. Among the conclusions drawn and recommendations made in Rio, one in particular has riveted the attention of the international community: the recommendation in chapter 12 of Agenda 21 on the elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification. The importance and the uniqueness of that recommendation lie in the nature of the instrument envisaged for its implementation.

In fact, the preparatory process for the Rio Summit was enriched by the concomitant negotiation of two extremely important Conventions: the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Those two Conventions now constitute the international standard for what has come to be known as the new generation of environmental conventions.

The United Nations Convention to combat desertification falls within the framework of the follow-up to and implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and is strengthened by the

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principle of sustainable development. This instrument is a commitment in the form of a conventional commitment agreed on by the international community with the aim of creating an appropriate legal framework to promote and implement the principle of sustainable development in fragile ecosystems. Of course, the question of desertification and its negative effects on the development efforts of countries that are seriously affected by it is not a subject new to the United Nations system. However, so far the approach, the operational framework and the institutional mechanisms used have not yielded results commensurate with the scourge. Hence, we all hope that this innovative approach inspired by the Rio consensus will live up to the hopes placed in it by the deprived populations of arid areas.

It is fitting to hail here the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, which has successfully discharged the mandate entrusted to it in resolution 47/188 by adopting the Convention within the allotted time. We now need to ensure that all the desired conditions will be established for the effective implementation of this instrument.

We trust that the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, within the framework of its interim mandate and in the Conference of the Parties, will set up a financial mechanism and make viable institutional arrangements like those relating to the Conventions on climate change and biodiversity.

However, the importance of this Convention is also reflected in its subject matter and its scope of application and intervention. Almost 900 million individuals are developed and developing. In Africa alone, over the course of barely 50 years areas the size of countries have been affected by desertification. Even today, hundreds of thousand of hectares of fertile land are being inexorably lost because of desertification, which has intensified serious food shortages, encouraged migratory movements and exacerbated political tensions.

These problems, closely linked to the process of desertification, take on an even more tragic dimension in Africa. Indeed, the international community has been aware of this fact, since it has specifically emphasized Africa in the negotiating process. Furthermore, following the adoption of this Convention, the principle of urgent action for Africa was decided on. This urgent action, which highlights the priority given to Africa, must be implemented during the interim period preceding the Convention's entry into force. In this regard, we must welcome the innovative approaches contained in the Convention — namely, the "bottom-up" approach, in which all those involved in combating desertification are clearly associated with partnership agreements for the implementation of programmes of action at the national, subregional and regional levels.

I am pleased, on behalf of the General Assembly, to thank the French Government for having agreed to organize the official signing ceremony in Paris, where 87 countries signed the Convention. I also solemnly appeal to all the States that were unable to do so in Paris to sign this Convention, so important for Africa and the world, during this session of the General Assembly.

In this connection, I wish to inform the Assembly that the text of the Convention is now in the Treaty Section of the Department of Legal Affairs and that the Convention is open for signature, in accordance with its article 33.

I now call on the Representative of the Secretary-General.

Mr. Kittani (Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on General Assembly Matters): As the Assembly knows, the Secretary-General left earlier today on a trip abroad. He asked me, first of all, to express his deep regret that he could not be here in person this afternoon to deliver his message and, secondly, to deliver it on his behalf. His statement is as follows:

> "During an impressive ministerial-level ceremony in Paris on 14 and 15 October, 87 nations and one regional organization signed the United Nations Convention to combat desertification. The Convention had been adopted in June 1994 after only 13 months of intensive negotiations. This was eloquent testimony to the resolve of the international community to promote sustainable development of the world's drylands in the framework of Agenda 21.
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> "At the signing ceremony, there were also over 60 statements from Governments and high-level officials of intergovernmental organizations outlining concrete steps to implement the Convention immediately in Africa. This is only proper, since the Convention gives priority to Africa and since the people of that continent, who are among the world's poorest, suffer the most from the effects of dryland degradation and drought.

"In fulfilling commitments made at the June 1992 Earth Summit, the Convention breaks new ground in international law concerning environment and development. It adopts for the first time a truly integrated approach, stressing action at the community level and giving the economic and social dimensions of combating desertification equal weight to its physical and biological aspects. It thus takes its place with the climate change and biodiversity Conventions as a third pillar of the new sustainable-development paradigm."

"Among the innovative features of the Convention is a series of regional implementation annexes which provide guidance for a system of national, subregional and regional action programmes. These programmes will be developed in the framework of partnership agreements with bilateral and multilateral donors as well as with non-governmental organizations. The Conference of the Parties will oversee and review this system.

"The Convention contains all the commitments necessary to succeed in the fight to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought. In the end, the key to success will be the will of the affected countries themselves and of the international community to implement the Convention effectively over the long term. Statements at the signing ceremony gave every indication that this will is there: first, affected African countries stressed their primary responsibility to initiate national action programmes, or restructure existing ones. They also exhibited their strong interest in working with neighbouring nations in elaborating subregional action programmes. Many also highlighted specific steps to inform their populations about the significance of the Convention and to set up appropriate procedures and institutions to make action programmes a reality.

"OECD countries on the other hand emphasized the high priority they give to urgent action in Africa and their intention to participate fully in consultative processes leading to partnership agreements. Many also indicated the magnitude of funding available for interim action along with specific programme initiatives. While it is not possible to give a precise figure, it appears that up to $2 billion will be available to support Convention implementation in Africa over the next two to three years.

"Latin American and Asian countries showed genuine enthusiasm for sharing experience and technical expertise with African countries.

"United Nations agencies and other international organizations concerned with combating desertification uniformly pledged to be full partners. They also described concrete programme initiatives they were taking immediately.

"I myself am committed to mobilizing sufficient funds and to ensuring the full involvement of all agencies in the United Nations family.

"We should now do everything possible to build on the momentum which the signing ceremony generated. First and foremost, I urge all countries which have not signed the Convention to do so in New York as soon as possible.

"Secondly, I hope that a strong consensus will emerge in the Second Committee on a resolution which will allow the International Negotiating Committee to continue its work during the period before the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties and which will permit the Interim Secretariat to support the Committee.

"Lastly, we must all work assiduously to promote ratifications of the Convention in order to ensure its early entry into force. This unique legal instrument bears great promise. It is up to all of us, working together, to guarantee that it lives up to the high expectations."

The President *(interpretation from French)*: I wish to inform delegations that there are approximately 30 speakers on the list of speakers for this item. I should like to propose, therefore, that the list be now closed. If I hear no objection it will be so decided.

It was so decided.

The President *(interpretation from French)*: I now call on Ambassador Bo Kjellén of Sweden, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee.

Mr. Kjellén (Sweden), Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee *(interpretation from French)*: It is with special satisfaction that I speak under your presidency this afternoon. It will be recalled that this process began with a decision taken by Ministers of Environment in Africa, in the capital of your country in November 1991. An initiative to launch negotiations was then resumed under Chapter 12 of Agenda 21. But the road to Paris began in Abidjan.

(spoke in English)

I am pleased to have the opportunity to present the result of the negotiation of the Convention to combat desertification to-day. As will be recalled, this negotiation was based on a decision by the General Assembly in 1992 (resolution 47/188) following the adoption of Agenda 21, chapter 12, in Rio de Janeiro. A negotiating committee was established with the task of negotiating a convention by June 1994. It is obviously with great satisfaction that I can now report that we were able to meet the time-limit and that this Convention is now taking its proper place as one of the three major legal instruments linked to the Rio de Janeiro process. The Convention is before the Assembly. We had very little time for the completion of the negotiation: as will be recalled the first negotiating session was held in Nairobi in late May 1993.

Thanks to the competence and the hard work of the secretariat of Mr. Arba Diallo and to the constructive efforts of all negotiators we were able to negotiate a robust Convention, which has already, as you, recalled, Sir, been signed by 87 countries at the ceremony organized by the French Government in Paris just a few days ago. Let me record here my gratitude to the Government of France for its readiness to receive the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for both the final negotiating session and the signing ceremony. The participation of so many eminent personalities in Paris, the substantial contents of the statements, comment on which we have just heard, and the general atmosphere of this perfectly organized event — all bodes well for the future of the Convention as does the interest that was taken by all representatives of the regional groups who participated in the negotiation. I am very grateful to all the friends who made this possible.

When I speak of a robust Convention, I refer in the first place to its coherence and legal consistency. It was indeed negotiated rapidly, but legal experts were reviewing the text as we went along and enabled us to arrive at a satisfactory document. Secondly, I believe that we have managed to strike a reasonable balance between the perception of desertification as a global problem and the obvious need for specific recognition of regional differences. The four regional annexes, which form an integral part of the Convention, give a special character to this Convention and form a bridge to the concrete implementation on the ground. Thirdly, I think that there is an innovative aspect of this Convention which might enhance its impact on the real world: the provisions for scientific cooperation and networking are part of a conscious effort to create a dynamic instrument of change.

What about the financial resources? No doubt the negotiation would have been easier if there had been ample new financing available. No doubt there was disappointment over the relative lack of precision in the financial provisions of the Convention. But I see no reason to underestimate what has been achieved in a period of heavy budgetary constraints and a general atmosphere of austerity. The global mechanism foreseen in the Convention may well turn out to be a very useful innovation and the notion of partnership and more efficient coordination in development cooperation may well lead to notable concrete achievements.

It would take me too long to go into a detailed presentation of the Convention. Let me just refer to two more features which in my view are essential. First is the bottom-up approach — enhanced respect for the local level and for the millions of men and women who live in the dry lands. The Convention can be a success only if their experience and expertise are fully taken into account. The second point is the integrated approach. We now realize that the problems of the dry lands need to be tackled with a whole range of measures, integrating land management, water management and energy needs while taking fully into account relevant socio-economic factors. Such issues as social structures, land ownership, educational and training facilities, local markets, transport and communications need to be given full attention and forged into powerful programmes of regional policy.

It is certainly my hope and expectation that many more countries will soon sign the Convention here in New York and that ratification procedures will move quickly. Nevertheless, it will take a certain amount of time before the Convention can enter into force. I recall that 50 ratifications are needed. But one characteristic of this Convention is the urgency of the problem. We are not just dealing with long-term problems here. As will be recalled, 900 million people are living in the dry

lands, and many of those face absolute poverty. There is no time to lose.

The situation in Africa is particularly worrying, and it is therefore logical that the Convention gives particular priority to Africa. This is expressed in the detailed African annex and in the resolution on urgent action for Africa, which calls for steps to prepare national and subregional action programmes and recommends the establishment of partnership arrangements in the affected African countries. Developed countries as well as international and multilateral organizations, agencies and programmes are also invited to provide enabling funds to support partnerships at the national and subregional levels. In fact, the urgent action for Africa is an expression of solidarity with populations who live under extremely difficult conditions, but it is also a test run for the methods of cooperation under the Convention.

As the Secretary-General stated, many countries have indicated their willingness to participate in this action, and it will be a major task for the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to support it during the interim period.

It is therefore also important to draw the attention of the General Assembly to the second resolution adopted by the Committee in June — the resolution on interim arrangements. It aims at enabling the Committee to continue its work until the first session of the Conference of the Parties. To this end, the Secretary-General is invited to make the necessary proposals and recommendations to the Assembly on future sessions of the Committee and the necessary secretariat support. These are before the Assembly in document A/49/477.

The General Assembly will have to adopt a draft resolution on the basis of this report. Consultations are already under way, and I trust that the draft resolution will not be controversial. Its contents will reflect the consensus achieved in Paris in June, and the procedure follows closely the one adopted with regard to climate change in 1992.

This means that the General Assembly is invited to agree on the convening of further sessions of the Committee in 1995 and 1996 and the continuation of the interim secretariat to provide the necessary support for the work of the Committee. A number of United Nations agencies and programmes would also be invited to expand their support for the Convention, and the importance of continued contributions to the voluntary funds would be underlined.

It will be recalled that last year the General Assembly made provision for one session of the Committee after the conclusion of the Convention. This session will begin in New York on 9 January 1995. The provisional agenda for the sixth session of the Committee was adopted in Paris in June. The two main items refer to the work programme for the interim period and to the preparation of the first session of the Conference of the Parties. No doubt these two clusters of issues will be with us for the whole interim period. The agenda for the first session of the Conference of the Parties will be a heavy one and in the interim the Committee will have the duty to review progress on the urgent action for Africa and to be concerned with the situation in other dry land regions, such as the alarming situation in the Aral Sea Basin, where a major environmental and human disaster has to be tackled.

With regard to the January session of the Committee, I wish to highlight another issue of particular interest to the General Assembly, one which was discussed in the Second Committee this week. It concerns the Committee's role in helping to prepare the third session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, to be held in April 1995. According to the thematic work programme adopted in 1993, this session of the Commission will deal with all matters relating to land, reflected in chapters 10 to 16 of Agenda 21. As task manager, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is preparing the main document for this discussion. But the Committee should take the opportunity — and the responsibility — to discuss desertification and drought in the framework of an integrated approach to land use, with the ultimate objective of achieving long term food security for a rapidly growing world population.

It is unavoidable that a statement of this kind becomes — if I may use the expression — rather dry. But, in concluding, let me become a little more personal. Carl Sandburg once wrote:

"The Republic is a dream.

Nothing happens unless first a dream."

This Convention first seemed like a dream to those of us who were struggling with chapter 12 of Agenda 21 here in New York in March 1992. We had the initiative to

which I have already referred, taken by the African Ministers of Environment in Abidjan in late 1991, as a point of departure. But there was no way of knowing whether this particular dream would ever materialize. Now the Convention is before us. It is a source of great satisfaction and at the same time a source of concern, because this time the international community must not fail in the implementation phase.

Therefore, I warmly welcome this debate in the General Assembly. It underlines the importance of the Convention and its essential role in the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The Convention supports and is supported by the overall concept of sustainable development. It supports and is supported by the Commission on Sustainable Development, the other Conventions and the great thematic Conferences — in particular, the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing next year.

But the impact of the Convention can be felt only if it is well known. I suggest that a major effort is needed to provide information and to make people aware in both developed and developing countries, and I would welcome imaginative proposals on how this could best be accomplished.

The Convention must lead to real action on the ground for the benefit of the people living in the dry lands. It must also be a dynamic factor in promoting research and reflection on the broad issues related to the vast dry lands of the planet.

Finally, I wish to underline the political importance of our endeavour. Because peace is indivisible, conflicts may arise out of the problems of the dry lands; scarce water resources can be the cause of war; impossible human conditions may lead to uncontrollable migration. This Convention is just one of the instruments for peace and sustainable development. But it is there now, ready to be used.

Organization of work

The President (*interpretation from French*): I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to agenda item 43, entitled "Restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields".

Members will recall that at the 105th plenary meeting of its forty-eighth session, the General Assembly adopted decision 48/507 to extend into the current session the consultation process that had been initiated during the forty-eighth session regarding resources for operational activities for development. The aim of the process was to address the financing needs, with a view to reaching concrete results as soon as possible and no later than June 1995.

In accordance with decision 48/507, I have requested His Excellency Mr. T. P. Sreenivasan of India to chair on my behalf the consultations, which should take place as soon as possible, indeed beginning this month.

Agenda item 89 (*continued*)

Environment and sustainable development

(d) Elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa

Report of the Secretary-General (A/49/477)

Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the reports of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (A/49/84, Add.1, Add.2)

Mr. Lamamra (Algeria) (*interpretation from French*): Allow me first of all to extend, on behalf of the delegation that are members of the Group of 77, on behalf of the delegation of China and on my own behalf, warmest congratulations to Ambassador Bo Kjellén of Sweden, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Convention that is the subject of our discussion, on his excellent introductory statement. I am pleased to tell him that I highly value the great commitment, perseverance and competence he showed in conducting the negotiation process, with a dynamic Bureau and an effective secretariat, led by my friend Arba Diallo, at his side. This process led to the fortunate outcome that we all welcome today: the signing by 87 countries on 14 October in the French capital of the International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. The conclusion of that Convention and its annexes gives us a legal framework within which we can now take multidimensional action with a view to slowing the pace of, if not totally stopping, one of the most serious forms of deterioration of our natural environment, and to

exerting resolute efforts to reverse this trend by dealing with problems of development, which underlie the very framework of the Convention.

Mr. Mwaunglu (Malawi), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In this regard, this Convention — and in the particular context of this discussion I shall not speak of certain limits that it places on the aspirations and proposals of developing countries — is part of the heritage of the Earth Summit and should be viewed from the perspective of sustainable development. This demonstrates the highly political import of this Convention, like those on climate change and biodiversity, as a significant contribution to the strengthening of the creative partnership between the developed countries and those affected by desertification and drought — this dual phenomenon that was appropriately identified by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development as being environmentally global in nature.

The outstanding political determination shown by the various parties to the negotiation is a valuable asset from which we should now launch our enterprise of implementing the commitments entered into. In this regard, the credibility of the partnership enshrined by this Convention will obviously be determined, to a large extent, by the mobilization of sufficient new and additional financial resources and the transfer of ecologically sound technologies for the benefit of the developing countries. The establishment of the global financial mechanism provided for in article 22 of the Convention will be, from this standpoint, an important first step towards taking adequate measures to combat desertification. We must therefore resolutely pass to the stage of action and see to it that this Convention does not meet the sad fate that befell the Nairobi Programme of Action.

I should also like to note with appreciation and optimism the political support shown for the Convention during the signing ceremony last week in Paris, and the financial commitments already announced by some of our partners. I hope that we shall soon witness a collective surge of responsibility and solidarity, which will quickly be manifested by contributions to, among other things, the two special funds that operate within the mandate of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee.

Although the phenomenon of desertification unfortunately spares no continent, it is Africa that has been ravaged to the greatest extent. In fact, more than 60 per cent of Africa's land is arid or semi-arid, and more than half its surface suffers from a lack of rainfall; the persistence of this situation leads each year to a further encroachment of the desert, thereby threatening the existence of almost 185 million human beings and rendering all efforts to protect and restore the soil extremely difficult and costly. Affecting more than 40 countries on the African continent, desertification irreversibly swallows up some 6 million hectares every year, diminishing their productive capacity — indeed, making them totally sterile. Because of this, almost 65 million hectares of African land, formerly verdant, have been taken over by the desert on the southern border of the Sahara alone over the past 50 years.

The serious effects of this scourge on both the environment and the population led to the convening in 1977 in Nairobi of the United Nations Conference on Desertification and the adoption there of the United Nations Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. Unfortunately, for lack of sufficient financial resources, this Nairobi Plan of Action did not go beyond the stage of a simple statement of intent.

Hope has now been reborn with the promising Convention whose conclusion the General Assembly hails today. But while we await the entry into force and the systematic implementation of this important global juridical instrument, the international consensus in favour of specific emergency assistance to Africa must be put fully into effect as quickly as possible, so that the African continent may play a pioneering role in the international community's counter-attack against the challenge of desertification.

A turning-point was reached in Paris last week, and another begins today. We should first of all see to it that there is no delay in the signatory States' ratification of this Convention, which bears a message of hope and solidarity, so that we can identify as quickly as possible the concrete action to be taken in the field. In addition, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee should be mandated to continue and intensify its task to that end. Above all, the International Convention to combat desertification and drought should give rise to a true spirit of cooperation, based on the partnership between the countries of the North and those of the South; this partnership — which today links the developed countries and the affected developing countries on the basis of the principle of common, but also differential, responsibility — should open up new prospects for international cooperation in preserving the ecological

balance of the Earth as the common heritage of the current and future generations.

Mr. Henze (Germany): I am speaking on behalf of the European Union, and Austria.

I should like first to join the Chairman of the Group of 77 in congratulating Ambassador Kjellén for his work on the Convention. His great efforts, deep engagement and persistence greatly contributed to the success of the negotiations, which, as we all know, were sometimes rather difficult.

The European Union feels that, two years after the Rio Conference on Environment and Development, we are now able to register important progress in the area of sustainable development. The Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, is an important milestone in this process. The European Union was determined to shape actively the negotiating process leading to this Convention from the very beginning. We are pleased that the final text was opened for signature just one week ago in Paris, on 14 October 1994.

Along with the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, a third important Convention arising out of the Rio Conference in the field of sustainable development has thus been successfully concluded. It is an integral part of the emerging framework of legally binding conventions and concrete action plans for sustainable development. We will have to continue on this road to tackle these urgent problems of humanity. It is a good example of how to maintain the right balance between development and environment concerns.

When we all initiated the negotiating process towards the present Convention during the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly, we knew how important the role of the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee and the corresponding support of the Secretariat of the United Nations would be. The Bureau, under the chairmanship of Ambassador Bo Kjellén, and the secretariat of the Committee deserve our deep gratitude for having wisely guided our deliberations. It was their personal commitment which helped us to negotiate the necessary compromises.

Speaking on behalf of the European Union and Austria, I am proud to underline that the European part in the negotiations was the result of a successful community exercise. The respective European Union presidencies of Denmark, Belgium and Greece, which led the European Union in these negotiations with enormous commitment, contributed to the successful conclusion of the negotiations. I further wish to thank the President of France and his Government, who, apart from their most valuable input into our Community deliberations, made it possible to sign the Convention in Paris.

The fight against desertification is a central element in our development cooperation. The European Union has long been responsible for approximately 50 per cent of global development cooperation. With regard to Africa, this percentage is even higher, at 62 per cent. The funds allocated for this purpose, in accordance with the Lomé Convention, in 1992 alone amounted to $1.9 billion. Since then, another $434 million have been promised to be made available from the Commission programmes for desertification schemes and forest and rural development programmes.

Despite all these efforts, however, we must realize that the situation of 900 million affected people has not improved as much as would be desirable and in some countries has even deteriorated. The lack of concrete, cause-oriented and effective programmes to combat desertification must be overcome. Too often, individual projects have been geared only towards clearing up symptoms while the actual causes and framework conditions which determine the conduct of land-users have not been sufficiently taken into consideration. Clear rights regarding soil ownership are very often the prerequisite of a form of land-use planning that promotes sustainable development. All parties to the Convention should therefore agree to make the fight against the root causes of desertification a primary focus of their negotiations.

As a consequence, the struggle against desertification has been given a new approach in the Convention. The European Union shares the confidence of its partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America that we have jointly learned the lessons of the past during the 18 months of negotiations. We feel that the process of elaborating national action programmes in developing countries is of the utmost priority. We are committed to continuing our assistance within the established framework. All those involved have to join forces. We believe that realistic action programmes that intimately involve the concerned populations are the best guarantee for a successful fight against desertification. The Convention offers the opportunity to implement

integrated, coordinated and coherent programmes at the national and subregional levels. The session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee scheduled for January 1995 should be able to put this process on track. The call is for specific answers to the concrete tasks of sustainable development and the regional implementation of Agenda 21.

A closely coordinated effort of donor countries and affected developing countries is imperative. A quick follow-up to the signing of the Convention, in particular the resolution on urgent action for Africa, must be ensured. Together we must create the conditions to improve the translation of action programmes into reality. Furthermore, the Conference of the Parties should be speedily prepared.

The fight against desertification is a critical element of sustainable development of global dimensions, in that it affects all regions of the world, including developing and developed countries. As a consequence, some of the affected countries of the European Union have assumed the particular obligation for implementing the Convention in the form of a special Annex applying to the Northern Mediterranean countries.

The Commission on Sustainable Development will address the issues of desertification together with those of sustainable land use, biodiversity and forests during its next session in 1995. As the discussion of sustainable development on the international level has become more and more concrete over time, we will have to deal with these issues in an integrated way to achieve a comparable level of progress across the board.

Mr. Fraser (Canada) (*interpretation from French*): This is the first Convention negotiated since Rio, and it reflects the spirit and commitment of the international community to protect the environment through the promotion of sustainable development.

As we stated at the signing ceremony for the Convention to Combat Desertification, in Paris on 14 October, Canada is proud to have taken an active part in the creation of an instrument that will permit concerted world action to attack the problem of desertification and to find solutions that are preventative, corrective and lasting.

(spoke in English)

Canada is particularly happy that it has been recognized that the fight against desertification must integrate socio-economic and cultural realities within the environmental context. Priority must be given to the reinforcement of human and institutional capacities of the affected developing countries and of their populations so that these people will be able to become masters of their own development.

For the Convention to bear fruit, it is crucial that affected countries assume leadership. Donor countries will contribute resources and technical assistance in support of these efforts.

As a measure of Canadian concern, the Canadian International Development Agency will commit $4 million for urgent assistance to Africa, as well as programming $100 million for anti-desertification programmes in Africa over the next five years. Ongoing projects in other regions will also contribute to efforts to combat desertification.

I am sure that my delegation would want me to say a special word of thanks to Ambassador Bo Kjellén and others, who worked so hard to bring about this Convention.

Mr. Ould Ely (Mauritania) *(interpretation from French)*: The delegation of Mauritania associates itself fully with the clear and eloquent statement made by Mr. Ramtane Lamamra, the Ambassador of Algeria, on behalf of the States members of the Group of 77 and on behalf of China. My statement today will therefore echo the position expressed on the content and implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa.

The fact that the General Assembly decided to hold this debate in plenary meetings under the presidency of Mr. Amara Essy of Côte d'Ivoire is in itself a happy coincidence. In fact, it was in Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire, that the idea of drafting a convention to combat the dual phenomenon of drought and desertification was launched in November 1991 by Africa's Ministers for planning and the environment.

This important initiative reflected the legitimate need to recognize that what is at stake is the survival of many developing countries, particularly in Africa, and to engage more effectively and more comprehensively in the struggle against the harmful and insidious effects of these two scourges. The same initiative became the foundation on which the Earth Summit built the process of negotiation to secure a strong and operational convention.

My delegation welcomes the unanimous adoption of the Convention and its annexes — in particular those that refer to Africa, which, quite appropriately, fill a legal gap in the sphere of the eradication of desertification and the mitigation of the effects of drought.

This undertaking could not have succeeded without the well-known foresight and dynamism of Ambassador Bo Kjellén, who chaired the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, and Ambassador Arba Diallo, the Executive Secretary, both of whom gave a decisive impetus to the negotiations. Once again we express our gratitude to them.

The other architects of success have undoubtedly been the authorities of France, who having backed this initiative from the outset, provided outstanding facilities for the last session of the Negotiating Committee. The most recent example was the organization, last weekend in Paris, of an impressive ceremony for the signing of the Convention. We therefore express our warmest thanks to France.

Indeed, the signing of the Convention by a very large number of Heads of Government and plenipotentiary ministers is undoubtedly the eloquent expression of a politically significant measure of great import. It is politically significant because it reflects a growing awareness of the worldwide scale of the problem and indicates a common interest in finding lasting solutions to these phenomena. This awareness stems from the complex impact of the phenomenon of desertification, which, in the event of failure to find remedies for its causes and its effects, may well give rise to serious gaps in the ecological balance of our planet.

Desertification is a global phenomenon with worldwide social, economic and environmental effects. It is a phenomenon whose full force is felt in Africa in particular, and it is accompanied by structural food shortages, endemic famine and rural depopulation, as well as by a worsening food situation and the incurring of external debt.

Faced with a steady drop in their per capita revenue, constantly worsening terms of trade, a constant reduction in their sources of foreign finance, and Draconian regulations governing access to markets for their products, the countries affected by this tragedy place a great deal of hope in the effective implementation of the financial and technical commitments contained in the Convention, as well as in the interim preferential measures.

We continue to stress that this is a global phenomenon and that the spread of desertification cannot be reduced to the simple dimension of urgency; its remedies cannot be limited to simple humanitarian operations, however necessary these may be. Because we have ignored this basic truth and hidden the true nature of the problem of desertification, the shortcomings of the solutions that have so far been advocated, through the 1977 Plan of Action, have been vividly revealed.

The advance of the desert irreparably eats up several million hectares of fertile land every year and requires the drafting and implementation in the medium and long terms of a global strategy focusing on control of the main causes of desertification. These measures are so urgent that we must ensure the rapid implementation of the Convention, which is an excellent framework for this process. In fact, the exceptional seriousness of the economic situation in the countries affected by these phenomena, especially those in Africa, calls for political will — and we are certain it will be manifested in the near future.

There can be no doubt that desertification and drought directly affect more than one fifth of the population of the Earth. Procrastination in the honouring of commitments will make it impossible to control the tragic effects of these phenomena. That is why, today, we have a historical duty to mankind to do everything possible to ensure the successful implementation of this Convention and, thereby, make it an instrument capable of generating greater wealth and prosperity.

Mr. Sreenivasan (India): I am happy to speak today, when we have, to some extent, achieved one of the objectives that we had set for ourselves at Rio. Along with the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the drawing up of the Programme of Action on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the successful conclusion of negotiations on the elaboration of a Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification is a matter of satisfaction.

India was among the countries that signed the Convention in Paris last week. India has also been one of the Vice-Chairmen of the Bureau that has assisted the process of intergovernmental negotiations and has actively participated in its deliberations as well as in the preparation of the regional annex for Asia. We wish to place on record our appreciation for Ambassador Bo

Kjellén of Sweden, whose painstaking efforts have brought these negotiations to fruition.

The urgency and moral imperative for tackling the problem of desertification and drought lies in the fact that it affects some of the poorest people in the world. Countries in which the vast majority of the people live off the land, finding both sustenance and employment in farming and agriculture, face catastrophic consequences with the loss of soil fertility, lack of rainfall and diminishing groundwater levels. Desperate bids to increase food production by clearing forests for farms and using chemical fertilizers ironically results in a vicious circle, perpetrating exactly that which is sought to be prevented. Poverty increases in extent and intensity. Growing populations and the inability to handle environmental problems are the consequences, not the causes, of underdevelopment and environmental degradation.

The world today is without a doubt alive to environmental issues as never before. In every country, in every remote village as well as in large and growing cities, there is palpable concern about the spectre of environmental disaster. But this concern seems to be expressed in ways that are diametrically opposite, depending on economic situations. The rich and well-off talk about ozone depletion, global warming and nuclear hazards, all the while inducing some of these through their unsustainable production and consumption patterns. The poor man, on the other hand, understands only that his crops wither in the barren lands; his wife knows that she walks up to a dozen kilometres daily to collect a few potfuls of water; and their children know, with harsh inevitability, that they will go to bed hungry once again.

Scientists and experts tell us that many of these problems are related to climate change, shifting monsoon patterns, falling groundwater levels and even, indirectly, to ozone-layer depletion, because of its ill-effects on vegetation. But how do we explain all this to the victims of famine and drought? How do we convince the toiling farmer of the linkages between his land's becoming more infertile day by day and the larger environmental issues? How do we give a human face to environment?

The most satisfying feature of the Convention we are signing today is that it reflects a basic concern of the developing world and directly seeks to tackle real human problems. It was no doubt contemplated largely in the context of Africa, a continent blessed with some of the richest natural resources on the planet but also hit by some of the harshest blows of nature. However, what is true of Africa is also true of the other regions of the world. The Convention also correctly distinguishes between deserts and lands prone to desertification and drought. Both conditions need immediate attention; specific situations need specific solutions. The regional annexes adopted along with the Convention bear testimony to the soundness of this approach and to its coverage of all the regions of the world.

India is a vast and varied country; indeed, it is a subcontinent in itself. From its lofty mountain peaks to its thousands of kilometres of coastline, almost every natural condition known to humankind can be encountered. It has deserts of sand and deserts of snow, but most disquieting is that 120 million hectares — nearly 40 per cent of our land area — are threatened with desertification in one way or the other. We have, over the years, initiated a variety of programmes to deal with these problems, to help conserve water and soil, to plant trees and preserve forests. Our afforestation effort alone is of the order of 2 million hectares annually. We have met with considerable success in our efforts, but these have been limited by the financial resources at our command.

Like everything else that resulted from Rio, including Agenda 21, adequate financial and appropriate technological resources need to be made available if the implementation of this Convention is to become a reality. The Global Environmental Facility includes in its mandate land-degradation issues, but this is only a very small beginning. The Facility cannot be expected to adequately meet the requirements of every pressing environmental need. The question of a well-defined and more specific financial mechanism must be quickly and constructively resolved. Questions of war and peace seem to have gripped the attention of donor countries to the exclusion of official development assistance. The irony of it all is that, since Rio, this assistance has actually declined in percentage as well as in real terms. We have to realize that environmental degradation is as much of a threat to the planet and to civil society as is war, and we will have to combat it with as much vigour.

Financial resources, important as they are, will not alone solve the problem. This complicated matter of halting and reversing desertification requires a significant input of appropriate technology. We have talked about the necessity of technology transfer for many years now and even committed ourselves to do so in the Rio agreements, but a consensus on how this is to be achieved has eluded us. On our part, we in India are

eager to share our technological expertise with our African brothers and sisters and to cooperate with them and other fellow developing countries in the fight against the marching sands. But unless the more advanced technologies of the developed countries are made available and accessible, at affordable rates and on acceptable terms, to developing countries on all continents, the problem of desertification will continue to remain intractable, threatening the very existence of our planet.

If global environmental issues are not to remain in the realm of the abstract, then there must be no more parched throats, no more needless threats to infant life, no more daily assaults on human dignity with the battering rams of hunger, unemployment and disease. Circumstances and situations that are life-denying must be moulded into those that are life-giving. Rio and the events that followed gave our planet one more chance. We must be careful lest we squander this opportunity.

Mr. Rowe (Australia): Combating desertification has been the subject of international efforts for many years, but these efforts have not met with the success hoped of them. Now, there has been a significant step forward. On 14 and 15 October, many countries signalled their commitment to carry forward efforts to combat desertification by signing the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa. Australia was among those countries which signed the Convention in Paris.

Australia wishes to pay tribute to the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, Ambassador Kjellén, for his outstanding work and contribution, and to the other members of the Bureau and to the Secretariat of the Committee in bringing about the outcome the Convention represents.

A great deal is at stake in this Convention. One sixth of the world's population and one quarter of the total land area of the world are affected by desertification. These facts and figures identify something far more important: the human misery and poverty associated with desertification. Many nations have taken steps, through the intelligent use of water and reafforestation, to reclaim deserts. Australia has taken an active part in the negotiations as an international citizen determined to contribute to improving the global environment and the well-being of so many affected people, especially in Africa.

Desertification is also an important domestic issue for Australia, as it is for several other temperate countries in the southern hemisphere. Some 70 per cent of the Australian continent is arid or semi-arid, receiving less than 500 millimetres of rainfall annually. Despite this, land- and resource-based industries play a vital role in Australia's economy. Agriculture is the largest user of land in Australia. While there have been significant increases in productivity over the last 40 years, there have been serious costs in land degradation. This has necessitated a change in approach to land management.

The Australian Government sees the management of land degradation as important to the long-term viability of Australia's land- and resource-based industries and the protection of our environment. In 1990 the Federal and State Governments of Australia agreed to develop a national decade of land-care plan. The aim of this plan is to achieve ecologically sustainable development through the implementation of a cooperative partnership between Governments at all levels, the community and individuals to address land degradation.

Community action is important in encouraging the adoption of changed practices. At the local level, land-care groups have been established to identify and respond to land-management problems.

The success of what we call the land-care movement is reflected in the participation rate — there are now around 2,200 land-care groups Australia-wide, representing some 30 per cent of landholders. The number continues to grow despite four years of drought and economic and social hardship in our rural communities.

These land-care groups in Australia look at practical measures for dealing with desertification and land degradation, such as taking unsuitable land out of agriculture; minimal tillage; reafforestation; contour and rotational cultivation and cropping; the use of the key-line watering system; and the growth of trees suitable for fodder supplementation in semi-arid and drought-prone regions. In these many ways our land-care groups add to an increasing knowledge which can assist Australia to maintain its productive assets and increase the natural environment.

Australia wishes to extend its own research and knowledge and to share this experience with the international community. Article 10 of the Convention, setting out the elements of national action programmes to

combat desertification, is based largely on an Australian proposal which was in turn based on Australia's experience with land care, and reflects our willingness to share that experience with other people and other nations with similar problems.

The international community's approach to the Convention has shown urgency and maturity. We have learned valuable lessons from past attempts to address desertification. It is no accident that the Convention concentrates on the socio-economic causes of desertification; and not just the symptoms. The emphasis in the Convention is on integrating "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches so that Governments and communities can work together.

This partnership extends to other areas of the Convention. Countries have agreed to work together to target and utilize more effectively existing funding for desertification programmes; to integrate and coordinate the collection, analysis and exchange of information relevant to desertification; and to promote technical and scientific cooperation.

But much remains to be done. We must ensure that the provisions of the Convention are converted into effective and practical action. The first step is the urgent action package for Africa. The Australian Government already supports various programmes in Africa addressing aspects of desertification and drought mitigation. Examples of these programmes include: reafforestation in Tanzania; rural water supplies in Mozambique; a land-information strategic plan for Namibia; rural rehabilitation in Eritrea; and agricultural training in South Africa through the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The Australian Treasurer, the Honourable Ralph Willis, announced in Paris last week a special contribution by the Australian Government as part of the urgent action for Africa programme, including a contribution of up to $A250,000 over several years for the provision of Australian constancy services in combating desertification. This money will be available to African States for technical assistance and advice in setting up their national action programmes. Australia also plans to undertake, through its Bureau of Meteorology, a joint feasibility study with the World Meteorological Organization for the establishment of a network linking the two drought-monitoring centres in Nairobi and Harare with the African Centre of Meteorological Application for Development, in Niamey. Australia is investigating means of initiating a research programme on the ecological problems facing arid and semi-arid regions. The aim is to produce a set of principles to guide the development of national action programmes for specific countries. We hope that these programmes will contribute to the launching and success of the urgent action for Africa programme.

Ways of dealing with the scarcity of water are a fundamental part of sustainable land management. A major focus must be on the proper use of water. Its wastage should be condemned and the encouragement of its productive usage must be a priority. In Australia we are only now — at a time when we are experiencing possibly the worst drought in Australia's history — coming fully to appreciate that water is not a cheap renewable resource.

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize again the importance of community participation in the battle against desertification. The Australian experience has shown that individual land holders, community groups and non-governmental organizations must play a crucial role in the implementation of the Convention; Government cannot do it alone. It has to be a joint and continuing contribution.

We urge the international community to work energetically. Cooperating together we can ensure that this Convention achieves its objectives for affected people around the world.

Mr. Hønningstad (Norway): I have the honour to speak on behalf of Norway and the other Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Sweden.

The ceremony in Paris a week ago for the signing of the international Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, represents a significant step in the follow-up of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). With its integration of environment and development, this important document epitomizes the basic concept of the Rio Conference — sustainable development. We pay tribute to the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee under the chairmanship of Ambassador Bo Kjellén, and to the Committee's secretariat for their efforts and valuable contributions to the negotiating process.

The Convention provides a framework for affected countries and peoples, as well as for relevant organizations and donors, to address the serious problems

caused by land degradation and the increasing imbalances between people and available resources. It will contribute to safeguarding the global environment. In addition to its significance for economic and social development, it will also reduce the risk of conflict that may arise from drought and lack of water. Not least important is the emphasis on urgent action for Africa through the special resolution to this effect adopted at the same time as the Convention.

Like the Rio process itself, the Convention will ultimately be judged by its implementation. This endeavour must be carried forward on the international, regional, national and local levels. It requires the involvement of all strata of society.

The Nordic countries will actively participate in the implementation effort. This includes reviewing development cooperation in areas such as poverty alleviation, land degradation and fresh water in the light of the Convention's provisions. It will thereby be possible to further develop relevant programmes in land management as well as in institution- and capacity-building.

The Convention has thus far been signed by close to 90 parties. It is now open for signature here at the United Nations in New York. The Nordic countries would like to echo the statement of the Secretary-General in this respect; we urge the countries that have not already done so to sign and ratify the Convention in order to ensure its entering into force as soon as possible. In the meantime, satisfactory arrangements for the interim period must be decided upon by the General Assembly, in accordance with the agreement reached in Paris in June and in the light of the report (A/49/477) of the Secretary-General under this agenda item.

The ceremony in Paris a week ago symbolized the end of a long negotiating effort. It should also signify the start of a decisive and purposeful endeavour to transform the paragraphs of the Convention into concrete action. We must use the next session of the Negotiating Committee in January and the session of the Commission for Sustainable Development in April to give impetus to this effort.

Mr. Eliashiv (Israel): The successful conclusion and adoption of the Convention to combat desertification, signed recently in Paris by a large number of States, including Israel, is indeed recognition by the international community that human beings in affected or threatened areas are at the centre of concerns to combat desertification and mitigate the adverse effects of drought.

This is yet another important achievement of the international community in the follow-up to the Rio Conference, as part of our commitment to build on the momentum of international cooperation on the environment and sustainable development. We must now translate the words of the Convention into deeds and implement a programme of action. We welcome the coordinated activities aimed at supporting the effective implementation of the Convention and the urgent measures for Africa. In this respect, United Nations organizations and agencies active in the fields of combating desertification and of development can play an important role by expanding and intensifying their support.

Our appreciation goes to Ambassador Kjellén and Ambassador Diallo for their efforts and contribution.

Desertification, a phenomenon of global dimensions, affects the lives and well-being of 2.7 billion people. All of us who are concerned about the environment must redouble our efforts to eradicate desertification. No country is exempt from this effort and each one, large or small, rich or poor, must contribute to facing the challenge to the extent of its capabilities.

Israel has a firm commitment to combating desertification. We can avoid each other's errors and emulate each other's successes. Nothing is more urgent than a programme of environmental information, compilation, dissemination and monitoring under international auspices. Nearly every problem has a possible technological or scientific solution, provided there is a desire to solve it and to make the financial means available. Solutions are viable only if they are conceived and put into effect on a global scale.

Israel is especially sensitive to the fragility of the environment and development because our country's rebirth is a continuous ecological drama of rehabilitating scarred, eroded, denuded landscape, of redeeming fertile valleys degraded into buzzing malarial swamps and of reversing the rapacity and neglect which had created the desert.

Man's endeavours to settle the desert and his attempts to extract a livelihood out of the barren land are as ancient as man himself. The Prophet Isaiah gave expression to these endeavours when he said

"The wilderness and the arid land shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the tulip." *(Isaiah 35:1)*

The central gift of Israel's experience to the hope of environmental improvement lies in the Negev adventure. Believing that the desert is man's creation and not the inexorable decree of nature or history, we have launched a campaign against aridity, with results that are being shared with other nations of the world.

Our research is adapted to the particular requirements of our area, and is linked to the very extensive developments in Israel in the use of water resources and in processes of desalination of sea water and brackish water in the desert. All of this research and development, which includes the highest degree of water control in the world, is directed towards turning arid deserts into green, fruitful, food-bearing soil.

The National Desert Research Institute at Ben Gurion University in Israel is engaged in research and development on arid zones and, in particular, on the conversion of the desert into a productive environment. The scope of the institution's activities transcends Israel's borders, for much of the research has worldwide significance.

In fact, Israel has already initiated its activities under the Convention by establishing a master plan for an international centre for combating desertification, to be located at Sede Boqer in the Negev Desert. This will actually be an extension and upgrading of the Blaustein Institute for Desert Research, which, in addition to its national responsibilities, will assume a regional and international role in the study of and training in desert research and desertification control.

Ms. Arystanbekova (Kazakhstan), Vice President, took the Chair.

Israel is willing to share its rich experience and know-how in combating desertification with neighbouring countries, as well as with other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. We invite all countries to join us in the venture of desert research and share our experience in finding solutions to desertification, in particular within the framework of the Convention's action programmes for our region in Asia.

The human factor is no less central to combating desertification, in bringing about the effective involvement of the population and in implementing national policies. Therefore, increased attention will have to be directed to human resources, sustainable development and the transfer of training and technology. We have placed a great deal of emphasis on the development of human resources, which has become the key to the country's technological expansion and a marked feature of its extensive technical and economic cooperation with other countries.

The importance of adequate funding mechanisms cannot be overemphasized. In this respect, we must continue to replenish and strengthen the capability of the Global Environment Facility to finance environmental programmes of the countries concerned. Non-governmental environmental organizations should be given our support for their continuing activities as catalysts for environmental improvement. Within the framework of the activities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, as part of the implementation of Agenda 21 and in support of the implementation of the concerted efforts to combat desertification, we are planning to convene in Israel in 1995 an international seminar on water management, co-sponsored by Israel and Japan. Furthermore, in November 1994, an international workshop on arid-land crops will take place in Israel at Ben-Gurion University in the Negev.

While general awareness and policies must be outlined on a global level, special importance should be attributed to regional cooperation in solving problems of common interest. The Middle East possesses vast desert lands, but meagre water resources. The desert can be turned into green, fertile land. The experience and technology are available. Water can be reused and new fresh water can be produced from the sea.

The historic landmark in the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians, the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan that was initialled on Monday and will be signed next week, the ongoing multilateral negotiations and the unprecedented conference that will convene in Casablanca later this month open new vistas for regional cooperation and partnership in devising ways and means to combat desertification and to advance economic and social development. We can work together to advance regional projects in arid-zone agricultural development, alternate sources of energy, and desalination technology. We can cooperate to establish a regional network of research and monitoring centres for combating desertification, thus promoting the welfare of all the inhabitants of our region.

We hope that peace will eventually embrace all neighbouring countries so that we can achieve a comprehensive settlement in our region and dedicate our efforts and resources to sustainable economic development.

Mr. Mongbe (Benin) *(interpretation from French)*: On 22 December 1992, when the General Assembly adopted, without a vote, resolution 47/188 on the "Establishment of an intergovernmental negotiating committee for the elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa", many delegations were sceptical about the Committee's chances for success.

Admittedly, the Assembly was taking the international community into difficult terrain; there were few studies or in-depth analytical documents to help the Committee and facilitate the negotiations. This was a challenge that all States had to take up in a joint effort. In spite of the difficulties, the pitfalls, the pressure and the sleepless nights, the negotiators managed to carry out their task with unswerving determination. Following an organizational session and five negotiating sessions that took the Committee from New York to Paris, via Nairobi and Geneva, a Convention was concluded on 17 June 1994.

Today, we can say with a feeling of satisfaction that the international community has won the battle. But it has not yet won the war to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought in affected countries. The road ahead is long, very long. We must hone our weapons and spare no effort if we are to achieve our goal.

The conclusion, adoption and opening for signature of the Convention will permit us to proceed to the more complex, slower-paced phases: ratification and entry into force of the Convention and the effective implementation of its provisions. The negotiators have not lost sight of these issues, which could be obstacles that would slow us in our progress towards the final objective.

In that connection, the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, on 17 June 1994, adopted a resolution on urgent measures for Africa, calling on affected African countries to take urgent action, including the preparation of regional and subregional action programmes. It also encourages developed countries and international and regional institutions to provide financial and other forms of support for African initiatives. The resolution recommends that African countries and donors strengthen their partnership. It is important to stress that the resolution on urgent measures for Africa covers the period from the signing of the Convention to its entry into force 90 days after the Secretary-General has received the fiftieth instrument of ratification.

I take this opportunity to thank all the countries and institutions that pledged contributions during their statements at the Convention's signing ceremony at Paris on 14 and 15 October. Those contributions will have a significant impact on the interim implementation of the Convention and will help us succeed in achieving the objectives to be met before the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties. I am convinced that States and organizations which have not yet stated their intentions will do so in the near future, thus demonstrating their firm commitment to the implementation of the resolution and the Convention.

This new international legal instrument is a concrete result of the decisions and recommendations of the June 1992 Rio summit; it is very different from previous instruments. For the first time, an international convention has integrated the ideas of environment and development; it has laid down principles that will underlie international cooperation in combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought. It has given us clear, precise guidelines on the measures we must take to attack those two scourges and coordinate national, subregional and/or regional programmes of action as well as the activities of communities and international and non-governmental organizations.

I should also like to emphasize that the Convention has four annexes for regional implementation, which allows activities to be adapted to the specific conditions of each region. The annex relating to Africa is the only one of the four regional texts to set out specific obligations in the implementation of which the developed countries parties to the Convention must give priority to Africa, the continent most affected by desertification and drought.

With regard to technical assistance, the African annex refers to the need to give preference to African experts, whose services would be far less costly than those of foreign consultants. In addition, in the body of the Convention, as well as in the annexes, which are part and parcel of the Convention, the idea of partnership is given pride of place, as is coordination of scientific and technological cooperation.

We owe everything we have been able to achieve, including the insertion of new elements in the articles of the Convention, to all the participants in the negotiation process, who showed determination, perseverance and responsibility in arriving at this compromise text. We cannot fail to make special mention of the exceptional role played by Ambassador Bo Kjellén of Sweden, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, who at trying moments used his great intelligence and patience to restore hope to the various participants in the negotiations. I take personal pride in having worked and continuing to work on the Bureau with that talented and experienced man. I would like to add to this friendly tribute my appreciation of my colleagues on the Bureau, the officers of the Working Groups, the spokespersons of the regional groups and interest groups, and all those whose discretion and selflessness helped cement together the stones used in building the edifice of this Convention. I naturally express fraternal feelings to Ambassador Hama Arba Diallo, Executive Secretary of the Committee, whose conviction, tenacity and personal commitment, with the support of a team of men and women of great skill and dedication, made it possible to provide optimal conditions for the Committee's work. The Organization of African Unity, with the encouragement of its Secretary-General and the support of the members of the joint secretariat and the ad hoc group of African experts on desertification, played an invaluable role that enabled Africa to maintain the initiative and conduct fruitful negotiations with other regions of the world.

I would be remiss if I did not praise the role and active participation of non-governmental organizations in the elaboration of the Convention. Last week's memorable ceremony for the signing of the Convention, organized by France, confirmed, if there was ever any doubt, the support the great country of France has always given to African delegations since they submitted this initiative to the Preparatory Committee of the Rio Conference. We should like to express here our deepest appreciation to France.

The time has come to turn our words into deeds. The Convention is an exemplary framework for action. It is our duty and obligation to act in order to put an end to the suffering of the populations affected throughout the world, especially those in Africa. In his statement at the ceremony for the signing of the Convention, Ambassador Arba Diallo stated:

> "The political will that prevailed in the negotiations for the Convention should also prevail in the various phases of its implementation. This is essential for its success."

I would like to endorse that idea, and I call on all States to continue to be inspired by the spirit of Rio, which guides us along the path of the achievement of sustainable development.

Mr. Rahman (Bangladesh): The elaboration of the International Convention to combat desertification has brought to fruition the sustained efforts generated since the Rio Earth Summit.

I add my voice to the warm tributes paid to Ambassador Bo Kjellén for his successful charting of the course of negotiations conducted through five preparatory meetings, held in three continents over two years, and for coordinating a wide variety of positions.

The introductory statements of Mr. Ismat Kittani, on behalf of the Secretary-General, and Ambassador Bo Kjellén succinctly outlined where we stand today and the directions for urgently following up the Convention, both in the short term and in its long-term orientation.

The Rio Earth Summit highlighted the crucial link between environment and development and propagated the now widely accepted and recognized concept of sustainable development. Yet, in adopting the Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, there was recognition that one specific issue was left pending: the degradation of vast areas of the Earth's surface because of drought and desertification. It is therefore a matter of great satisfaction that this void has now been filled in.

No one can doubt the significance of the fact that 25 per cent of the land surface of the earth is afflicted by the spread of drylands and creeping desertification. This has affected the lives and well-being of 900 million people. The impact of this phenomenon has been most severe in Africa. Bangladesh has fully supported the need, in taking remedial steps, to accord particular priority to affected African countries.

We believe it is important, however, that attention also be devoted to vast areas that are potentially vulnerable to and threatened by the desertification process. Desertification, as we all know, is caused by a complex interaction between physical, political, social, cultural and economic factors. It is therefore vitally necessary to anticipate and adopt a forward-looking

approach. A host of preventive actions should constitute the core of any effective strategy, since prevention and reduction of land degradation is more economical than reclamation of desertified land. Another integral element of an overall strategy would be combating drought, since prolonged drought can cause serious land degradation leading to desertification.

I am happy to announce that Bangladesh signed the international Convention to combat desertification in Paris last week. As is well known, Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Given the poor land-man ratio and the urgent need for enhanced food production, there is a growing concern that prolonged drought, inadequate rainfall, a drastic fall in the ground-water table, and the consequent change in soil properties and the soil degradation in recent years, especially in the dry season, will have a sustained and cumulative adverse impact on our economy and living standards. There are already appreciable indications of semi-aridity in the north-western region of the country. The situation is further aggravated by decreased water flows in some major river systems, particularly during the dry season. The management of water resources in the eastern Himalayan region falls far short of meeting the ecological needs of the region.

Various provisions of the Convention constitute a useful basis for effectively combating drought and desertification. Recognition of the need to integrate strategies for eradicating poverty into efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought is vital. We sincerely expect that under the obligations enjoined by the Convention developed countries parties to the Convention would actively support the efforts of affected developing countries, particularly those in Africa, and the least developed countries in dealing with the problem.

Bangladesh attaches particular importance to the implementation of preventive measures for lands that are not yet degraded or which are only slightly degraded, and the international community should complement such measures. We feel that such measures may include, *inter alia*, the establishment of early-warning systems, the strengthening of drought preparedness and management and food security systems. The cooperation of the international community, particularly in the framework of subregional action programmes, is crucial in this regard. Such cooperation should include, among others, joint programmes for the sustainable management of transboundary natural resources. We also appreciate the spirit of partnership which prevailed throughout the negotiations and the bottom-up approach involving local participation. The role of the non-governmental organizations can be a critical element for the effective implementation and follow-up of the Convention.

We welcome the simultaneous adoption of the three regional annexes, which form an integral part of the Convention. They provide concrete guidelines for a focused approach on regional specificities. As for the regional implementation annex for Asia, the broad diversity ranging from areas already affected to areas vulnerable to desertification and drought has been duly recognized. Provisions for subregional joint action programmes have broadened the scope for coordination and meaningful cooperation in various fields.

It is particularly important that partial data or lack of precise data should not be an excuse for inaction, whether by decision-makers and by the global community at large. Delay would be terribly costly as some forms of environmental damage may be irreversible. We hope that the dangers of an impending environmental crisis may be instrumental in forging closer cooperation in research, exchange of information, transfer of technology and technical know-how. We also look forward to an equitable sharing of resources among countries rich and poor, with a view to saving our planet and ensuring the betterment of the lives of future generations.

This brings us to the critical issue of the means of implementation of the various measures envisaged in the Convention. The United Nations Environment Programme has estimated that it would take between $10 billion and $22.4 billion a year for 20 years to prevent further land degradation and to undertake numerous land conservation projects. In this context, the question of new and additional resources is of crucial importance. Bangladesh fully supports the idea of the global mechanism and hopes that the global mechanism as envisaged in the Convention will be successful in promoting actions leading to the mobilization and channelling of substantial financial resources, including the transfer of technology, on a grant basis or on concessional terms to affected and threatened developing countries. The Global Environment Facility, with limited resources to implement Agenda 21 and the Conventions on climate change and biodiversity, is now overburdened as Governments are urged to promote the mobilization of adequate, timely and predictable financial resources, including new and additional funding from the Global Environment Facility.

The problem of desertification has assumed global proportions with contingent economic, social and political connotations. We believe there is a moral obligation on the part of the comity of nations to help those millions whose lives are directly affected by this problem. As we move towards combating desertification, the global community should put equal emphasis on arresting land degradation, especially in densely populated countries. Bilateral and multilateral financial mechanisms and arrangements must take into full consideration the special situation and needs of the least developed countries as they are striving hard to overcome the menace of desertification and to arrest the threat of land degradation. The urgency of taking any remedial action cannot be overemphasized.

Mr. Azwai (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: Allow me at the outset to express thanks on behalf of my delegation to all those who have contributed directly or indirectly to the elaboration of the International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, which was signed in Paris last week.

This Convention is the first international mechanism to combat desertification. We attach great hopes to this instrument for the preservation of the planet and for ensuring future development on it for present and future generations.

It is a fact that desertification and drought are among the most important problems threatening environmental balance with the resultant threat to human life in many parts of the world. The African continent is the region most affected by drought and desertification. It is gratifying that this has become an international concern. The need to combat this grave problem is widely recognized. The Convention to combat desertification was elaborated as a follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. It is our hope that it will enjoy the political and financial support needed for the achievement of the objectives that previous efforts failed to achieve because of limited resources.

My country attaches the greatest importance to questions of environment and development, as it is exposed to the encroachment of the sands from the south, sea pollution in the north, the scarcity of water resources and rainfall fluctuations, and periods of drought which last, sometimes for three to five years. All these phenomena are rendered more acute because of the scarcity of underground water which is not sufficient for irrigating arable land.

Recognizing the importance of the grave threats posed by these phenomena to the natural resources we depend upon for food production, my country has cooperated with the countries members of the Arab Maghreb Union in elaborating a Maghreb strategy to combat desertification, in the setting-up of the Maghreb green dam project and in establishing an African network for monitoring and exchange of information in the areas of desertification and soil erosion.

At the national level, my country has taken several steps, particularly the following: First, the setting-up of administrative structures mandated to implement the policy of combating desertification, preserving and developing natural soil and water resources, in addition to expanding afforestation programmes and the development and improvement of pasture land. Second, the enactment of laws for the protection of agricultural land and natural resources such as the Land Use Act, the Water Act, the Forestry Act and other laws which aim at the preservation and development of the sustainable use of natural resources.

Many studies and researches have been carried out in the areas of surveying natural resources, categorizing types of soil and determining their possible uses under various conditions as well as developing water resources. On the basis of those studies, many dams have been built to preserve rain water and replenish underground water reservoirs with a view to expanding the arable area. Also, dams have been built in the valleys to stop soil erosion.

Millions of saplings were planted in areas that were threatened with desertification. Windbreaks have been planted to protect agricultural lands and tens of thousands of moving sand dunes have been stabilized with the use of oil products and by planting trees. The studies have proved the feasibility of transporting water from the desert areas to the coastal areas in the north with their relatively temperate climate, population density and arable land. This has led to the great man-made river project which aims at supplying nearly 6 million cubic metres of water daily for the irrigation of additional areas of agricultural land.

This would protect those areas from desertification and reinforce Libya's efforts to protect the environment.

The Prime Minister of Malaysia rightly paid tribute to this action in his statement before the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session when he stated that:

"Libya should be congratulated on tapping underground water to irrigate its desert." (*Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-sixth Session, Plenary Meetings, 7th meeting, p. 91*)

My country has spared no effort over the past 25 years in combating such severe natural phenomena as drought, lack of rain and limited water resources. Expenditure on the agricultural sector has reached over $15 billion, in addition to expenditure on the great man-made river which would cost, when completed, more than $30 billion. The first stage has been completed. The second stage is still under way.

However, all these efforts are being hampered by two factors. The first factor is the danger of the mines which were planted in Libya's territory during the Second World War. These mines prevent the reclamation of large tracts of arable land along the coastal area. At various sessions of the General Assembly, my country has called upon the countries concerned to cooperate with us in demining those fields and to pay compensation to our people for the damage inflicted upon them.

The second factor is the unjust embargo imposed on my country by Security Council resolutions. The embargo has slowed down and, at times, paralyzed our research programmes, including those dealing with combatting desertification and other environmental phenomena.

With the necessary political will to provide financial support for the implementation of the Convention, we will achieve great results in combatting desertification and drought. Without such support, it will suffer the same fate as other international instruments in that field. We count on the cooperation and exchange of experiences on the international and regional levels.

Mr. Ladsous (France) *(interpretation from French)*: France wishes to endorse the statement made by the representative of Germany on behalf of the European Union and, in particular, to associate itself with the tribute that he paid to Ambassador Kjellén and to the secretariat of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for their tireless efforts to conclude an international convention to combat desertification within the established time frame.

As the Assembly is aware, France wished to show the particular interest it has in this Convention by proposing that the last negotiating session and the signing ceremony be held in its capital. This ceremony, which took place at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on 14 and 15 October, brought together representatives from 114 States and 24 United Nations agencies. On that occasion, 85 States and one organization for regional economic cooperation signed the new Convention. This success exceeded the expectations of the organizers and should facilitate the ratification and implementation of the new instrument.

With the Paris Convention we now have a pragmatic instrument which reflects our real determination to adapt ourselves to the terrain and specific characteristics of each of the regional situations.

The Convention is one of solidarity. It defines the framework for true partnership in accordance with which, first of all, the countries affected by desertification should undertake an updating of their national plans of action and, at the national level, mobilize all those involved in the implementation of the broad guidelines of the Convention.

Moreover, donors will have the possibility to improve the coordination of their efforts and to act as true partners with the countries affected.

We welcome the fact that this text provides for urgent measures for Africa because this continent, though not the only one affected, is the one hardest hit by desertification.

France will make implementation of the Convention one of its priorities in the matter of cooperation particularly in the countries of the Sahel.

It will be attentive to local initiatives and will support the implementation of national plans of action. It will support projects to mobilize populations to manage their own natural resources, in particular their water resources, and France is committed to reducing the effects of desertification on the nomadic peoples which are particularly affected.

Finally, in 1995 France will launch a new programme relating to renewable sources of energy in Africa. The objective of this programme will be to reduce the impact of domestic energy consumption on forest resources.

For all of these actions to combat desertification, my country currently earmarks F 1 billion per year. To that should be added our contribution to the World

Environment Fund, which could help in the financing of efforts to combat desertification in view of its impact on the global environment.

France hopes that this action will be based on regional solidarity, in particular through the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel. My country will contribute to the funds to assist the nine countries in that region and will mobilize additional resources to enable the Committee to assist the States of the Sahel in setting up their national plans.

Moreover, my country, whose research teams have gained knowledge and know-how in the matter of desertification, will, of course, be involved in the work of the Sahara and Sahel Observatory. The President of the Republic of France himself hailed the creation of this Observatory in 1989.

Finally, in 1997, the next surveillance satellite spot will be specially equipped with a new instrument that will facilitate the follow-up, on a continent-wide scale, of the phenomenon of desertification and regrowth of vegetation.

We need to act urgently and as I have said, my country intends to do all it can to ensure the success of the Convention. I am certain that in this struggle we will all be working in partnership.

Mr. Koshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the Chairman, the Executive Director and the secretariat of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification (INCD) for their tireless efforts during the negotiations on the Convention on Combating Desertification.

The conclusion of the Convention is one of the positive developments towards sustainable development which the international community has been able to achieve since the Rio Conference on Environment and Development. The Islamic Republic of Iran, which has signed the Convention, wholeheartedly welcomes its conclusion and calls for its expeditious ratification by all countries in order to boost collective efforts to combat desertification. We should not lose time. Advantage should be taken of the interim period before the entry into force of the Convention to work out national and international programmes of action especially the mobilization of financial resources. In this respect, the scheduled session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee in January 1995 is significant.

Desertification and drought are problems of global dimension, affecting almost all regions and threatening the lives and prosperity of more than 900 million people. As noted in Agenda 21, desertification and drought affects one sixth of the world's population and one quarter of the total land area of the world. A problem of such magnitude cannot be dealt with single-handedly. It can only be dealt with at the national level. There is need for concerted international cooperation to combat desertification in all its aspects.

The implementation of the Convention depends to a great extent on the provision of substantial new and additional financial resources. The United Nations Environment Programme has estimated that between $10 billion and $22.4 billion would be required annually for an effective 20-year global programme. This would include the cost of rehabilitating land already degraded and of preventing the further loss of fertility. As decided during the negotiations, the Global Environment Facility will serve also as the financing source for the Convention. At present, after a new replenishment of the Facility, only $2 billion for a three-year period is pledged. This amount falls far short of the requirements of Agenda 21 itself. Therefore, unless new commitments are made, the Facility will be unable to meet the financial requirements of the programmes of action envisaged by the Convention.

I should like to discuss briefly the problem of desertification in Iran and the activities undertaken by the Government so far. About 80 percent of Iran's total land area has an arid or semi-arid climate and is thus vulnerable to desertification. Deserts account for 34 million hectares of Iran's total land area, with an average annual rainfall of 50 millimetres.

The causes of desertification are not all natural. Such factors as population growth, over-grazing and unsustainable use of rangeland, the use of wood and plants for fuel and the uncoordinated exploitation of water resources have contributed to land degradation and desertification.

To address this threatening trend, the Government has allocated large amounts of resources to desertification control activities. At the same time, specific measures are being undertaken to increase public awareness, to decrease migration to urban areas through socio-economic

development of rural ones, to protect the environment and restore the ecological conditions of degraded lands, to stabilize sand dunes and to encourage public participation. Recently a national committee was established to coordinate all the activities aimed at combating desertification. The Committee is currently involved in formulating a national programme of action for desertification control.

Taking into account the pivotal role of multilateral cooperation in this crusade, the Islamic Republic of Iran has also focused on bilateral and multilateral cooperation with interested countries and relevant international and regional organizations. Following negotiations with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the United Nations Environmental Programme, a Desertification Control Programme Office has been set up to prepare national projects, train experts and carry out research and studies on desertification.

In conclusion, while reiterating my country's commitment to international cooperation in combating desertification and drought, we call on the international community — in particular, the developed countries — to stand by their own commitments as elaborated in the Convention.

Mr. Maycock (Barbados): I have the honour to address the Assembly on behalf of the 12 States of the Caribbean Community that are members of the United Nations, namely, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and my own country, Barbados, on agenda item 89 (d), "Elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa".

The States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) fully associate themselves with the statement made by the Chairman of the Group of 77 on this issue. We wish also to pay tribute to the effective leadership of Ambassador Bo Kjellén of Sweden, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, and his Bureau, as well as the competent support provided by the Executive Secretary, Mr. Hama Arba Diallo, throughout the negotiating process.

That process, set in train by a specific decision taken at Rio de Janeiro and by the mandate given in General Assembly resolution 47/188, has culminated in the adoption of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. Last weekend, in Paris, 87 countries signed the Convention. Given its critical importance to the countries affected, we support the call for prompt action to ensure its early entry into force.

While the Convention that has been adopted did not meet all of our expectations, we nevertheless believe that it represents an important advance in the international community's efforts to address a major problem that carries with it serious adverse consequences both for the environment and for development.

In our view, the Convention is a balanced document that recognizes the complex dimensions of the problem of desertification as involving not only physical and biological factors but also those of a political, social, cultural or economic character, and that advocates integrated response strategies based on community participation and partnership at the local, national, regional and international levels.

Important recognition is given to the effects of desertification and drought on the sustainable development efforts of affected developing countries and on the interrelationship of these effects with the issues of poverty, population, health and nutrition, food security and migration. Similar attention is paid to the effect of international economic and trade conditions on the ability of affected countries to combat desertification adequately. The triangular approach and the focus on the elaboration of action programmes through the widest possible consultation, participation, and coordination are important features of the Convention, which we commend.

The clear emphasis given to the catastrophic dimensions of the problem of desertification in Africa in both the Convention and the relevant regional implementation annex are, in our view, completely justified, and we fully support the content of the Committee's resolution on urgent action for Africa. At the same time we are heartened by the recognition given to the global nature of the problem through the conclusion of implementation annexes for other affected regions, which take into account their particular conditions. Desertification and drought are of serious concern to several of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and we welcome the specific provisions of the implementation annex for our wider region.

Desertification is a global phenomenon from which no country can consider itself immune. It affects 25 percent of the world's lands and 900 million of its people. While we in the Caribbean have been spared the ravages of desertification in its extreme form, we have of late become increasingly exposed to the effects of persistent drought, which has this year caused severe damage to the agricultural sector and adversely affected the water supply of many of our countries. Climate change and climate variability, which perhaps share a causal link with desertification, may have been contributing factors.

The preventive and remedial experiences of others in our region and beyond, particularly in the area of land, water and crop management, are therefore of considerable interest to us, and in this regard we welcome the emphasis placed on strengthening the functioning of the global network of institutions and facilities for the collection, analysis and exchange of data and information.

It is the hope of the CARICOM member States that the seriousness with which the international community applied itself to the task of elaborating the Convention will be matched by a clear demonstration of the necessary political will in the implementation stage. For, like Agenda 21 itself and the other Conventions and processes to which it gave rise, the desertification Convention will be critically dependent for its successful implementation on the provision by the international community of adequate financial resources, access to relevant technologies, and appropriate measures for capacity-building. In this regard, we look forward to the elaboration by the Conference of the Parties of the modalities to govern the global mechanism established by the Convention.

The States members of CARICOM have taken careful note of the report presented by the Secretary-General in document A/49/477, which gives a clear picture of the considerable preparatory work, both procedural and substantive, that must be undertaken pending the entry into force of the Convention and the convening of the first Conference of the Parties. Many important initiatives can be set in train during the interim period to ensure the early and effective operation of the Convention once it enters into force. We are confident that the General Assembly will take the necessary action at this session to enable the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee and the interim secretariat to carry out their tasks towards this end.

Mr. Erdenechuluun (Mongolia): At the outset, I wish to express my delegation's sincere gratitude to Ambassador Bo Kjellén of Sweden, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, for his outstanding contribution to the elaboration of the International Convention to Combat Desertification. We owe our gratitude also to Mr. Hama Arba Diallo, Executive Secretary of the Negotiating Committee, and his staff for their excellent work, which was instrumental in the timely adoption, on 18 June 1994, of the Convention.

We believe that this Convention is a valuable addition to the Rio environmental treaties — the Conventions on climate change and biodiversity — and represents a solid basis for our future activities. What is required now is an adequate response on the part of all actors, at both the national and the international levels, to implement the provisions of this Convention. Taken together, these international instruments will help solve the world's major environmental problems.

Mongolia welcomes the adoption of the Convention and its signature by a large number of States and is looking forward to its prompt entry into force and its subsequent effective implementation. Mongolia was one of the first to sign the Convention in Paris. We believe that the Convention is an important means of promoting international cooperation, harmonizing national, regional and international efforts, and mobilizing resources for tackling one of the most serious environmental problems facing the world today.

Mongolia is particularly pleased that the Convention addresses the underlying causes of desertification, including human behaviour and environmental and socio-economic factors. The Convention's great significance lies in the fact that it is based on the premise of the interdependence of environmental and development problems. Desertification represents a major barrier to sustainable food security and threatens the livelihood of many millions of people around the world; hence the imperative need for international cooperation to confront this challenge resolutely.

My delegation considers it important that the momentum created by the adoption of the Convention be sustained. It is in this context that I wish to commend the specific ideas and proposals made in the Secretary-General's report (A/49/477) in regard to future arrangements for the work during the interim period leading to the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. A considerable amount of preparatory work will have to be carried out if that Conference is to be successful. A great deal will no

doubt depend also on actions at the national, subregional and regional levels. Here, one cannot overemphasize the importance of a new approach reflected in the Convention, which focuses, *inter alia*, on a "bottom-up" philosophy involving the participation of local populations and non-governmental organizations in the preparation and implementation of action programmes, as well as on the concept of partnership agreements bringing together affected countries, the developed and other countries, and international organizations in the attainment of common objectives.

The mobilization of adequate financial resources is a most important prerequisite to the effective implementation of the Convention. In this regard, my delegation wishes to commend the recent aid packages announced by the donor community at a high-level meeting in Paris. However, we cannot fail to stress time and again the importance of new and additional resources.

We hope that the establishment by the Convention of a global mechanism will help raise substantial financial resources, including those for the transfer of technology to affected developing countries. It has been recognized that the land-degradation issues, primarily desertification and deforestation, would be eligible for financing by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Hence, it will be one of the mechanisms and sources of financing the implementation of the Convention. The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee and the GEF should, in our view, already start cooperative action during the interim period.

Desertification, drought and deforestation are of major concern to Mongolia as well. One third of our territory is desert, as defined in the Convention. There is also a large portion of land which is highly vulnerable to desertification. The edge of the southern arid region is moving northward at the rate of about 50 metres per year. Drought, which is a frequently occurring phenomenon in our country, affects half of its entire territory and represents a great burden on our economy. Creeping desertification is having an increasingly destabilizing effect on the country's biological diversity.

In order to address these problems adequately, Mongolia adopted in 1992 a National Plan of Action to Combat Desertification. It was drawn up with an emphasis on preventive policies and actions against desertification, taking into account long-term and cost-saving benefits. To implement this Plan of Action, a Gobi Desert Development Centre was set up to study the ecological situation of the Gobi desert and the natural anthropogenetic factors of change as well as control of ecological balance; formulate practical measures to combat desertification and organize research work for environmental monitoring in desert areas; and elaborate a strategy for the sustainable economic and social development of arid areas.

It goes without saying that, as in other developing countries, practical implementation of these projects requires national capacity-building coupled with scientific and technological cooperation with other countries and international organizations. Mongolia is looking forward to meaningful deliberations on this important issue at this session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Abdellah (Tunisia) *(interpretation from French)*: The Tunisian delegation would like first to express its satisfaction at the adoption and signing by a large number of countries of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa.

The binding nature of this multilateral agreement is a positive step in the implementation of commitments made at the Rio Summit. We are therefore at a decisive turning-point in the efforts of the countries concerned and of the whole international community to find appropriate, lasting solutions to the scourge of desertification.

With the impending implementation of the Convention, the States parties, with the help of all the organizations concerned, have managed in a short time, just two years after Rio, to give themselves an instrument to combat this natural phenomenon, which is a considerable hindrance to development in a number of developing countries, particularly in Africa.

Tunisia, whose borders are being eaten into by the desert, is genuinely optimistic that the objectives of the Convention will be realized. An effective and dynamic world partnership is capable of curbing desertification, which threatens ecological balance and nullifies development efforts.

The importance that the African continent attaches to the Convention's implementation cannot be overemphasized. The continent's interest in the matter was expressed yet again at the most recent Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit, held in Tunis in June this year, when the African States committed themselves to setting up the structures needed to implement the Convention and the annex relating to Africa.

Owing to the scale of the phenomenon of desertification and its devastating effects, which impinge on many areas, the African States realize that alone they do not have the capacity to wage an effective struggle against it without help. The struggle to which we are committed calls for technical and financial inputs that the affected countries cannot provide on their own. Therefore, the Convention should be a means of mobilizing the potential of the countries concerned while tapping international financial and technical assistance commensurate with the scale of the worldwide phenomenon of desertification and its threat to life on Earth.

In this regard, I am pleased to stress that Tunisia has already taken extensive action to protect the environment threatened by creeping desertification. The national strategy, with several years' experience behind it, has been bolstered by the recommendations of the Rio Summit. The tool for managing this strategy, called "*Main Jaune*", is based on integrated development through close cooperation between various ministerial departments and effective participation by local communities and populations that are affected.

Tunisia, which has considerable experience and expertise in this area, can contribute by putting that experience and expertise at the disposal of brother African countries. This brotherly cooperation can be an effective means of pushing back the advance of desertification, a scourge which endangers natural wealth and life in several regions of our continent.

As it assumes the chairmanship of OAU, Tunisia would like to remind the international community and the relevant international, regional and non-governmental organizations of the seriousness of problems connected with drought and desertification and of the need for perseverance in solving them. The assistance that the African continent urgently needs requires us all — donor countries in particular — to give the question of desertification the importance it merits as a worldwide environmental problem with serious implications for development.

As the problem far exceeds the potential of the countries affected, the Republic of Tunisia has taken the initiative, through its President, Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, of proposing a series of practical mechanisms for international cooperation based on the necessary North-South solidarity. They include recycling debt into projects to protect the environment and ensure sustainable development.

Tunisia's interest in the question of desertification is encouraged by the success of the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the elaboration of the Convention. Here I should like to pay tribute to Mr. Bo Kjellén, who chaired the Committee, and Mr. Arba Diallo, the Executive Secretary, who, through their perseverance and their combined efforts, contributed to the success of the negotiations between the various parties.

Mr. Karukubiro Kamunanwire (Uganda): My delegation is grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate on the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. This Convention is a vital link in the elaboration of legally binding instruments to save our globe.

I should like also to express our sincere gratitude to the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Committee's report (A/49/84 and Add.1 and 2). We also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his related report (A/49/477).

In 1908 Winston Churchill described my country, Uganda, as "the pearl of Africa", as a land that was

> "from end to end one beautiful garden, where the staple food of the people grows almost without labour."

The country at that time knew no drought, no famine and, indeed, no poverty. The livelihood of our people was sustainable. Today drought, famine and poverty have become an endemic problem. Food security can no longer be taken for granted. Poverty has contributed to unsustainable agricultural practices and environmentally harmful use of our forest resources, which, in turn, have led to drought and desertification.

This situation typifies a phenomenon that is taking place worldwide. According to available statistics, the degradation of dry lands threatens the livelihood and food security of more than 900 million people in over 100 countries. The process of desertification now affects one quarter of the global population. In Africa, over 70 per cent of agricultural dry lands are already degraded, while more than 60 per cent of the land is already desert or dry land. These sad trends will certainly spur the loss of biological diversity, cause climatic change, trigger migrations and add to an already overburdened

international community unquantifiable demand in humanitarian assistance.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, approximately $1 billion is spent annually on desertification programmes. The threshold level for funding an effective anti-desertification campaign is estimated at between $10 billion and $22.4 billion per annum for the next 20 years. Meanwhile, desertification is estimated to cost $42 billion in agricultural income annually. Against this background, the case for new and additional funding is compelling and must be recognized.

Uganda welcomed the General Assembly's timely establishment, in resolution 47/188, of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee. A long and arduous negotiating process followed. Uganda participated actively in that process, which culminated in the conclusion of the Convention in Paris on 18 June this year.

My delegation welcomes the priority accorded to Africa in the Convention. In that regard, we were particularly encouraged by the resolution adopted by the Negotiating Committee on urgent action for Africa for the interim period. By that resolution, the international community committed itself to providing tangible support to Africa during the interim period. Regrettably, the response from the international community at the signing ceremony in Paris, on 14 and 15 October, was lukewarm. I wish to make a special appeal to the international community to respond favourably to the commitments undertaken in Paris in support of Africa, especially with regard to the provision of financing, technology and other resources needed for the effective implementation of the Convention.

Uganda, for its part, concluded a Natural Environment Action Plan that provides a national policy framework to address environmental concerns. We also undertook a case study in the area of desertification. We are now finalizing the preparation of specific project profiles drawn from priority areas in the case study. The project profiles clearly define our own contribution towards their implementation as well as the additional resources needed from donors and the international community to support our endeavours. As regards the signing of the Convention, the necessary legislative procedures have been completed, and we will sign the Convention shortly here in New York.

We remain committed to the efforts of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) to address the problem of desertification in our subregion and have participated actively in various IGADD consultations to elaborate subregional projects on desertification. We appeal to the international community to support our subregional and regional efforts.

For the interim period, it is necessary that effective measures be put into place in preparation for the entry into force of the Convention. The interim secretariat should be facilitated in undertaking transitional activities until the permanent secretariat of the Convention is designated by the Conference of the Parties. Equally, other critical institutional and substantive issues such as financing mechanisms and the terms of reference of the Committee on Science and Technology should be agreed upon at the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention. For these to be realized, it is necessary that adequate human and financial resources be mobilized to support the interim arrangements. We therefore wish to echo the Secretary-General's appeal for such support.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that desertification is a global problem that requires global solutions. For us to succeed, the international community must marshal the political will and resolve to address this problem.

Mr. Ayewah (Nigeria): The Nigerian delegation would like to contribute to the debate on agenda item 89 (d), "Elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa", and to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report (A/49/477) dated 5 October 1994. My delegation also wishes to associate itself with the statement made on the subject by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

In paying tribute to the Government of France for hosting the fifth and final session of the Negotiating Committee and for providing facilities for the initial signing ceremony of the Convention, which took place in Paris last week, we wish to underscore the continuing relevance of international efforts to combat the ravages of the natural phenomena of desertification and drought. We thank Ambassador Bo Kjellén of Sweden, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, the members of the Bureau and the United Nations Secretariat for their diligence and hard work throughout the negotiation process.

The most significant accomplishment of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on the desertification process, therefore, is the international attention that has been mobilized around this problem. The negotiation of the Convention has been a success in linking those affected by desertification with donors, United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. The negotiation process of the Convention undoubtedly laid the foundation for future global partnership arrangements to combat desertification.

Let me also say that the journey of the Convention on Desertification started in June 1992 in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and following the adoption of Agenda 21 by the international community. Nigeria welcomes the conclusion of the International Convention to Combat Desertification and looks forward to its entry into force. We have taken note of the fact that the Convention addresses major environmental problems and provides a framework that departs largely from the past inadequate arrangements made by the international community to address the problem. However, our preferred option would have been the institutionalization of the spirit of Rio by having a fifth window, for Desertification, in the Global Environmental Facility, in order to ensure predictability, transparency and coordination of funds at all levels.

In this regard, we recall that it was the lack of financial support by the international community that led to the failure of the Nairobi Plan of Action to combat desertification, which was adopted in 1977.

Many countries in Africa, including Nigeria, are seriously affected by desertification and drought. Most of these countries fall within the category of least developed countries, which have inadequate resources to confront the environmental hardships occasioned by these scourges. There is therefore an urgent need to check the vicious cycle of poverty attendant on land degradation.

It is against this background that we call on the international community to provide the necessary additional financial resources and technological assistance to complement national efforts in order to combat desertification and drought, preserve the ecosystem and prevent further environmental degradation, particularly in Africa.

In conclusion, Nigeria hopes that the Convention will enjoy universal support so that it can justify the purpose of its adoption and be a complement to the Conventions on climate change and biodiversity.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.